



***Joint statement by United Nations Human Rights Experts\* on care and support systems on the occasion of the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2)***

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*Ahead of the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2), a group of UN experts calls on States to make concrete commitments on care and support systems through the following joint statement:*

Care and support are foundational to the well-being and prosperity of individuals, communities, economies, and ecosystems, serving as the essential fabric that sustains our world. They are integral to our social connections, collective well-being, and economic strength. Every person requires care and support at some point in life and possesses the capacity to provide it—it is both a universal need and service that binds us together, reflecting our shared humanity, dignity, and intrinsic vulnerability. Nonetheless, care and support work is frequently unrecognized as work, and even when acknowledged, it is often undervalued, underpaid and unprotected. Although care and support are a collective responsibility that benefit everyone, prevailing gender stereotypes and the gendered division of labour result in women and girls shouldering most of the care and support work, often at the cost of their own human rights and well-being. Globally, women and girls provide more than three quarters of unpaid care work, while in the paid care sector, two thirds of the workers are women.<sup>1</sup> Older women, in particular, often continue to provide unpaid care for spouses, grandchildren, or other family members well into later life, despite facing their own declining health and economic insecurity. And the role of women and girls with disabilities in providing care and support remains invisible and unvalued due to stigma and ableist attitudes. Moreover, when women and girls themselves need care and support, they often encounter gender-based discrimination, which often intersects with ableism, ageism and other forms of discrimination. In a rapidly aging world, this situation is likely to worsen unless the care and support system undergoes a gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and age-sensitive transformation.

The perspectives and lived experiences of those requiring care and support – particularly children, persons with disabilities, and older persons – must be an integral part of care and support policies to ensure these are rights-based, effective, and sustainable. Access to support according to their choice and requirements is key for the enjoyment the rights

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<sup>1</sup> Unsdg | [Transforming Care Systems: UN System Policy Paper](#)



of persons with disabilities and older persons, including the right to live independently, be included in the community, and be free from institutionalization and segregation. Care and support are also important for those providing care and support to others, such as family members of persons with disabilities - particularly mothers and other female members. Comprehensive care and support systems must encompass accessible infrastructure, assistive technology and devices, universal social protection schemes that cover extra costs related to disability, and affordable, quality and community-based services. This includes, but is not limited to, childcare, inclusive and quality education, healthcare, rehabilitation and habilitation, adequate housing, long term and other support services.

Care and support are an integral part of human life and community and should be shared and distributed between States, business, communities and households, and equally between men and women. Recognizing and valuing care and support work, along with promoting policies that uphold the autonomy and dignity of those providing and requiring care and support are essential for the enjoyment of human rights for all, especially women and girls, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons. The economic contribution of unpaid care and support should be counted in the GDP. An equitable redistribution of care and support work together with creating and strengthening support services based on individual needs, autonomy and choice will foster a more just, inclusive and thriving society that benefits everyone. This is vital for advancing substantive gender, disability, and age equality, achieving sustainable development and for leaving no one behind. As articulated in SDG 5.4, the establishment and promotion of infrastructure, social protection, public services, and shared household responsibilities are fundamental to achieving these objectives. Paid care and support workers should be rewarded with decent working conditions and all rights holders should be meaningfully represented in decision-making processes.

The upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2) presents a pivotal opportunity to make good on commitments in the 2024 Pact for the Future and push for inclusive and rights-based care and support systems worldwide as a key lever for sustainable development. At this critical moment, we urge the transformation of these systems to challenge and move beyond gender-based norms, ableist attitudes, and ageist stereotypes that perpetuate inequalities and discrimination, as well as stereotypes and discrimination based on and intersecting with other grounds, including race, albinism, sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant, minority, Indigenous or other status, and health conditions such as leprosy (Hansen's disease) and other neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Achieving this necessitates substantial investment from States into the rights-based care and support economy, advocating for a gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, age-sensitive, human rights-based, and intersectional approach



grounded in the principles of substantive equality, non-discrimination and intergenerational solidarity. Lastly, meaningful and equal participation of all rights holders, in all their diversity, must be guaranteed in every phase of the transformation of care and support systems, through inclusive and gender-equal participatory policymaking processes, social and inter-generational dialogue, freedom of association and collective bargaining.

*ENDS*

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